

NOT ENOUGH IS KNOWN ABOUT CHINA CORONAVIRUS STRAIN, SAYS WHO OFFICIAL RODERICO OFRIN

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

The Wuhan Huanan Wholesale Seafood Market, where a number of people related to the market fell ill with a virus, remains closed in Wuhan, China on January 21, 2020. | Photo Credit: [AP](#)

As [six deaths were reported in China](#) due to the Novel Coronavirus [2019-nCoV], Dr. Roderico Ofrin, Regional Emergency Director, [World Health Organisation \(WHO\) South-East Asia Region](#), has said much remains to be understood about the virus.

In an interview to *The Hindu*, he said an emergency meeting of the WHO will assess the situation. It will decide whether the situation constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, and what recommendations should be made, explained Dr. Ofrin.

According to WHO Worldwide, there have been a total of 222 officially reported, confirmed cases of 2019-nCoV — 218 in China, [two in Thailand](#), [one in Japan](#) and [one in the Republic of Korea](#) — as on January 20.

Stating that not enough is known to draw definitive conclusions about how the virus is transmitted, the clinical features of the disease, its severity, the extent to which it has spread, or its source, Dr. Ofrin said, “Based on previous experiences with respiratory illnesses and in particular with other Coronavirus outbreaks and our analysis of data shared by China, human to human transmission is likely occurring.”

“More cases could be expected in other parts of China and possibly other countries in the coming days,” he noted.

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome. A Novel Coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.

“An animal source seems the most likely primary source of this outbreak, with limited human to human transmission occurring between close contacts. WHO’s guidance to countries includes the possibility of the disease spreading through contact with animals, contaminated food, and/or person to person,” said Dr. Ofrin.

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). A [novel coronavirus](#) (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. Some transmit easily from person to person, while others do not.

Worldwide, there has been a total of 222 officially reported, confirmed cases of 2019-nCoV — 218 in China, two in Thailand, one in Japan and one in the Republic of Korea [as of January 20]. More cases could be expected in other parts of China, and possibly other countries, in the coming days.

Much remains to be understood about this novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). Not enough is known to draw definitive conclusions about how it is transmitted, clinical features of the disease, its severity, the extent to which it has spread or its source.

The [WHO Director-General is convening an Emergency Committee on the new coronavirus](#) under International Health Regulations. The Committee will meet on January 22 to advise him if the situation constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, and what recommendations should be put in place.

Reports suggest that 2019-nCoV infection can cause mild to severe disease, and be fatal in some. Based on current data, some new cases seem to experience milder disease, which is within the milder end of spectrum of symptoms caused by respiratory illnesses.

Based on current information, an animal source seems the most likely primary source of this outbreak, with limited human-to-human transmission occurring between close contacts. As the source of the outbreak remains unclear, WHO's guidance to countries and individuals includes the possibility of the disease spreading through contact with animals, contaminated food, and/or person-to-person.

Based on previous experience with respiratory illnesses and in particular with other coronavirus outbreaks and our analysis of the data shared by China, human-to-human transmission is likely occurring.

On January 20, Chinese authorities confirmed that, in the light of the latest developments, there is human-to-human transmission among close contacts, though the extent of such transmission is not able to be determined with available information.

Although an animal source seems the most likely primary source of this outbreak, investigations are still required to determine the exact source and mode of transmission of the virus.

WHO is proposing specific studies to better understand transmission, risk factors, and source of the infection. Some of these studies are being undertaken already.

A team from WHO is concluding a mission with health officials in Wuhan working on the response to 2019-nCoV. While in Wuhan, the team has been meeting with health experts and officials conducting the investigation into the outbreak, the mission is part of ongoing information-sharing between the Government of China and WHO.

WHO has been in regular and direct contact with Chinese as well as Japanese, Korean and Thai authorities since the reporting of these cases. The three countries have shared information with WHO under the International Health Regulation (IHR).

WHO is constantly analysing data as we receive it, and working closely with global networks of experts on a range of topics. As more cases are identified and more analysis undertaken, we will get a clearer picture of disease severity and transmission patterns. We will update and expand our guidance as we learn more.

WHO is working with our networks of researchers and other experts to coordinate global work on surveillance, epidemiology, modelling, diagnostics, clinical care and treatment, and other ways to identify, manage the disease and limit onward transmission.

WHO has been working on strengthening health security through the implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) adopted by 194 countries. The IHR are an international

legal instrument that aim to help the international community prevent and respond to acute public health risks that have the potential to cross borders and threaten people worldwide. IHR require countries to report certain disease outbreaks and public health events to WHO. Building on WHO's experience in global disease surveillance, alert and response, the IHR define the rights and obligations of countries to report public health events, and establish a number of procedures that WHO must follow in its work to uphold global public health security.

WHO has been working with countries to build core capacities to respond to public health emergencies. And when events such as the current one occur, WHO, based on evidence, shares guidelines with member countries to prevent and minimize impact of these events.

On this novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), WHO has issued interim guidance on testing as well as infection prevention and control practices for suspected cases, and continues to update this information in consultation with networks of experts across the globe. WHO is working closely with countries to help them prepare for the rapid detection and response to cases or clusters.

Even before an outbreak strikes, WHO is constantly on alert for the emergence of known and new severe respiratory diseases and offers technical advice and capacity strengthening as needed, including laboratory support. We are mandated to keep other countries informed of any threats and to provide guidance on how to respond. On January 2 the incident management system was activated across the three levels of WHO (country office, regional office and headquarters) and the Organization is prepared to mount a broader response, if needed.

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